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ABSTRACT

Part of a systematic, in-depth assessment of Miami-Dade Community College's (MDCC's) educational programs, student support systems, and selected campus-level activities, this volume of the college's institutional self-study report examines the impact and effectiveness of student information systems and performance standards. This report presents results of evaluative research on MDCC's three computerized systems designed to increase effectiveness in student academic support. First, an introduction to MDCC's student information and academic performance reforms is provided, including an overview of the Advisement and Graduation Information System (AGIS), the Academic Alert, and the Standards of Academic Progress (SOAP). This section offers a discussion of the stages of development of each of the systems, their current scope, and evaluation needs. A section on methodology and a review of general findings are followed by evaluation results for each system. Finally, a summary section presents collective findings and conclusions, including: (1) faculty need more familiarization with AGIS; (2) though the AGIS system is effective in meeting its intended objectives, certain components should be modified for clarity and better communication regarding AGIS usage should be instituted; (3) the Academic Alert system has had a positive impact on student performance; and (4) students and personnel need a better understanding of SOAP policies. (HB)

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VOLUME IV

STUDENT INFORMATION AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

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VOLUME IV

STUDENT INFORMATION AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

ADVISEMENT AND GRADUATION INFORMATION SYSTEM

ACADEMIC ALERT

STANDARDS OF ACADEMIC PROGRESS

MIAMI-DADE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

1984 INSTITUTIONAL SELF-STUDY

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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDENT INFORMATION AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS REFORMS

Miami-Dade Community College has developed three computerized student academic support systems evaluated in this volume under the collective heading of Student Information and Performance Standards (SIPS). These systems address collegewide reforms resulting from the College's 1974 Institutional Self-Study and the package of curriculum changes for postsecondary schools inaugurated in 1977 by the Florida Legislature.

The first of these systems, the Advisement and Graduation Information System (AGIS), provides students and faculty with a complete and comprehensive report of student progress toward graduation. The second, Academic Alert, informs students of their mid-term academic performance and attendance. The third, Standards of Academic Progress (SOAP), identifies and monitors progress of students having academic difficulties.

The sequential order of presentation was selected because of the chronology of student exposure to these systems. AGIS is an overall system providing reports on academic status to every student after the second week of matriculation. Academic Alert is an early-warning system which gives instructor feedback on academic performance and attendance to students immediately after mid-term. SOAP is an end-of-term evaluation of student academic performance which places students in one of several academic standing categories determining academic programming for future terms. Current Academic Alert feedback and SOAP status are included on the AGIS reports.

These three systems respond directly to several recommendations from the Miami-Dade 1974 Institutional Self-Study for improving student services in the areas of greater faculty participation in academic affairs, better identification of gifted students, clarification of differences between advisement and counseling, and dissemination of information about available

counseling services. AGIS, Academic Alert, and SOAP also give faculty, counselors, and advisors a method for monitoring student progress and prescribing necessary courses of action to facilitate the task of increasing effective services to the College's multi-cultural student body.

Since this volume focuses primarily on results and recommendations, only salient features of the history and operation of the present programs are presented. However, more extensive background information is available to SACS reviewers in separate reference files, and to other readers on request.

THE ADVISEMENT AND GRADUATION INFORMATION SYSTEM (AGIS)

One of the universal criticisms of American colleges is the lack of sophistication and precision in their academic advisement processes. The difficulty arises in trying to advise large numbers of students with small cores of skilled advisors. The problem is evident at institutions such as Miami-Dade whose current enrollment is over 41,000 credit and 15,000 non-credit students. A parallel problem is information flow. It is difficult to communicate updated and accurate information to faculty and staff in order for them to counsel students into appropriate programs, help them make proper course selections, and guide them smoothly toward career objectives. AGIS was designed as a strategy to alleviate such advisement problems.

The system provides accurate, up-to-date information on the progress students are making toward meeting graduation requirements. It also informs students of specific courses suggested or required in the 74 Associate in Arts degree programs for transfer to upper-division universities in Florida. Additionally, it shows to what degree these suggestions or requirements are

being followed. All students may receive updated AGIS printouts anytime during the term to monitor progress and assist in their advisement for subsequent course selections.

Stages of Development

AGIS was developed for use on the College's mainframe computer using on-line data-entry terminals connected by a teleprocessing system. All programming for the system was done in COBOL for ease of maintenance and machine compatibility.

Phase one, the planning stage, was begun in 1977 and completed in August 1978. The chairperson of academic advisement from each of the four campuses, a systems analyst, the Director of Curriculum Systems and Articulation, and the Project Director were assembled as the collegewide development team. This team visited several institutions that had degree audit systems and wrote to many others soliciting pertinent information. The educational specifications for the AGIS project were developed as part of a year-long planning process.

The second phase, outlining recommended courses for transfer to various Florida colleges and universities for inclusion in the AGIS system, was completed in March 1980. The start of actual programming was the development of the outline of requirements in Florida colleges. The system was originally developed for card input but has since been changed to an on-line system.

The third phase, completed in August 1980, programmed a graduation check for Associate in Arts degree students having earned only Miami-Dade Community College credits. Students with transfer credit were then added to the system. Every transfer course had to have a Miami-Dade designator placed next to it on the computerized College transcript or a special transfer course notation indicating the type of graduation requirement that the course would satisfy.

Concurrent with this Associate in Arts degree report, the on-line course substitution waiver file was also completed, providing a method for manual overrides to the graduation requirements for exceptional cases.

The fourth phase of AGIS development, standardizing all Associate in Science degrees and Planned Certificate program outlines, was in place by October 1980. Since Miami-Dade is a multi-campus institution with one set of graduation policies, course offerings, and catalog, the District Office of Academic Affairs developed a computer-generated program outline to describe its various programs. This report outlines the courses and credits required for graduation as well as prerequisites required to help insure success in more advanced courses.

Phase five, programming graduation checks for students working on Associate in Science degrees, Planned Certificates, and Associate in General Studies degrees, was completed in March 1981. The entire AGIS system is built around a career pathway concept. Students who are matriculating for a Planned Certificate program in a particular area also receive a corresponding Associate in Science degree report.

The sixth programming phase, instituting weekly and end-of-term data mailers, was completed in May 1981. When an application for graduation has been submitted, a data mailer is produced informing the student that he or she is eligible or ineligible to graduate based on the student's current record and successful completion of current courses. On the other hand, if an application has not been submitted and the student is eligible to graduate, a data mailer is sent to the student indicating the need to complete and submit a graduation application.

Data mailers are also used to advise students if they have registered for a course which is not required for graduation in their Associate in Arts degree

program. Another type of data mailer is used to inform non-degree students of their status relative to the Associate in Arts degree. Since many students will ultimately change from non-degree-seeking status, this data mailer provides appropriate graduation information.

A seventh and final phase in AGIS development, anticipated by approximately June 1985, will include suggested sequencing of courses based on students' backgrounds, educational goals, and proposed transfer institutions. Combined with the existing system, this innovation will provide a complete advisement picture upon which students and advisors can make informed academic decisions.

Current Scope

All Miami-Dade students, whether degree-seeking or not, are eligible to have an AGIS form printed at any time. Presently, approximately 45,000 AGIS printouts are produced collegewide in each major 16-week term, and some 145,000 requests are serviced during an academic year.

To receive an AGIS printout, a student must present adequate personal identification. No one is allowed to receive an AGIS report for another person because of the privacy of information contained. After a student's College matriculation number is entered into a computer terminal, an AGIS report is produced on a printer.

As a direct result of the AGIS system, advisors now feel more comfortable and secure in advisement, and can devote more time to student problems and career goals. Degree requirements are consistent among the campuses, and there has been marked improvement in the clarity of outlining updated degree requirements. The students receive accurate, up-to-the-minute information on graduation requirements, which minimizes potential litigation arising from poor

or inaccurate advisement. Transcripts can now be issued the day after grades are due and reflect earned degrees. Automatic degree approval and grade postings to the transcript occur immediately, resulting in substantial savings of staff time on degree audits. What previously took ten advisors six to eight hours on each campus to complete can now be accomplished by three advisors doing spot checks of the same information for three hours on each campus at the end of each term.

At least once a year, and more often if necessary, the chairpersons of academic advisement from all Miami-Dade campuses meet to review changes in the catalogs of Florida institutions. Changes required to update AGIS information are routed to the District Office of Admissions and Registration Services. Here the paperwork required for computer programmers to make AGIS modifications is processed. This involvement in overseeing AGIS changes averages four hours per week. When programming changes are required, a College programmer spends approximately eight hours per week to perform these modifications.

The collegewide Academic Affairs Committee, chaired by the Vice President for Education, meets monthly to discuss course and program changes affecting AGIS information. Approved changes are sent to the District Office of Admissions and Registration Services for computer program updating. Additionally, any minor or technical changes can be approved by the collegewide Dean of Student Services and processed through the Vice President for Education. Substantive changes are handled primarily by the Academic Affairs Committee but occasionally flow through other standing groups, such as the President's Council, before being approved by the Vice President for Education.

Initial developmental costs to the College for AGIS from 1979 to 1982 amounted to $203,880 for 12,000 hours of computer programming using existing College staff, equipment, and disk storage. Federal funds under Title III

totaled $129,656 for the same period. The three-year combined cost from all sources was $333,536, or an average of $111,178 per year. The College now has an annual direct cost avoidance of $234,765 from AGIS since it has eliminated the manual graduation audit, eliminated the equivalent of 3.21 student services professional advisor positions, and reduced the Registrar's graduation check time by 20%. During the first two years of AGIS, operational costs ran $95,630. Added to the developmental costs mentioned above, AGIS costs were $429,166 during its first two years of operation. Savings to the College those same years totaled $469,530, for a net savings of $40,364. Future yearly savings on AGIS to the College are estimated at $186,950 (McCabe, 1984b).

Needs for Evaluation

Since AGIS has been in operation only a few years, assessment data are limited, with many of its components having yet to be examined systematically. A preliminary small scale study by the Dean of Student Services at the College's South Campus indicated approximately 75% student satisfaction with AGIS (Schinoff, 1984). The present Self-Study has undertaken a more intensive evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of AGIS with the goals of identifying areas for further development and improvement, and recommending specific strategies for their attainment.

ACADEMIC ALERT

Academic Alert is a computerized system to inform students of their mid-term performance through an individualized letter which not only reports academic and attendance status as "satisfactory" or "needs improvement" but also prescribes actions for the students to take in order to improve their

status. The system is an expression of the College's moral obligation to its students, stemming from the general education reforms, to provide better services to students and thus prevent their suspension (Kelly and Anandam, 1979). The system also responds directly to the 1974 Self-Study recommendation for providing information about all students for the purpose of advising them at successive stages of their careers.

Academic Alert involves not only faculty and students but also administrators and staff who interact to help the students maintain academic progress, complete their programs of study, obtain assistance in problem areas, and earn their degrees. The Academic Alert letters are sent to every student during the fall and winter terms so that their performance can be evaluated at regular intervals. The letters indicate whether students' academic work and attendance are satisfactory or need improvement. The letters also clearly identify the areas of difficulty and describe the services available for assistance in solving academic problems.

Stages of Development

After the initiation of the College's educational reforms of the late 1970's, Miami-Dade administrators realized that the College would need an improved advisement system in order for students to maintain satisfactory academic performance. The administrators also realized that if the Miami-Dade advisors were to meet with each of the more than 40,000 credit students each major term to provide the information they now receive in the Academic Alert letter on an individualized basis, it would take them 31 working days, provided that

- The advisors dedicated all of their working hours to this task;
- Advisors devoted 15 minutes to each student;

- Advisors had a miraculous way of scheduling a student every 15 minutes; and
- Students kept their appointments.

By use of a sophisticated computer system called Response System with Variable Prescriptions (RSVP) to generate the Academic Alert letter, the information is now conveyed to all students in one week.

In developing the Academic Alert system, 150 different messages were written for each of the four campuses. A data-base of student information such as credit load, previous performance, ethnic affiliation, native language, age, and basic skills test scores was also developed. The system requires all faculty members, full-time and part-time, to provide answers to two questions for every student enrolled in their classes: How is the student's performance ("satisfactory," "needs improvement," or "no evaluation available")? and How is the student's attendance in classes ("satisfactory," "not satisfactory," or "does not apply")? The combinations of data and Academic Alert messages add up to 26,878 possibilities. In other words, the system can produce 26,878 different letters to reflect information unique to each student.

The system was piloted in the Fall Term of 1978 with 9,706 entering students receiving Academic Alert letters. The program gradually expanded to include all students except those enrolled in credit-by-exam, credit-for-life experience, Open College (a television and radio delivery system), and short-term courses. By the Fall Term of 1984, 37,563 students received Academic Alert letters (Anandam, 1984).

The impetus for continued development and refinement of the Academic Alert system was the advent of the Standards of Academic Progress (SOAP). At the end of each term, students receive a message on their grade report indicating their academic status as "in good standing," "academic warning," "academic probation," "academic suspension," or "academic dismissal." It was apparent

that negative SOAP messages were presented at the end of the term to students with excessive withdrawals or low grade point averages (GPA's), then a system to alert them of their performance halfway through the term would be needed. Academic Alert fulfilled that need.

As indicated above, the current Academic Alert program sends a mid-term progress letter to all Miami-Dade students enrolled in the fall and winter terms. The spring and summer terms are too short to gather faculty evaluations, process the data, and mail letters to students by mid-term under the current procedures. The student recipients include full-time and part-time, degree and non-degree, and day and evening students.

Current Scope

The Academic Alert activities are coordinated by a collegewide committee composed of the academic advisement chairpersons from the four campuses and chaired by the Director of Computer-Based Instructional Development and Research. This committee is responsible for establishing the annual schedule for Academic Alert activities, updating room and phone numbers in the various RSVP messages, and adding and modifying messages necessitated by changes in College policies and procedures. Specific operational activities are assigned to various College and campus offices.

The campus academic advisement chairpersons are responsible for communicating with the appropriate campus personnel responsible for carrying out specific Academic Alert duties, alerting the faculty to the importance of completing the academic progress rolls, and making sure that each Campus Vice President sends all faculty a memorandum to this effect. The advisement chairpersons also collect suggestions and comments from campus personnel for improving the Academic Alert system and follow up on returned letters which did not reach students.

The Computer-based Instructional Development and Research Office coordinates all Academic Alert activities (including programming), submits requests for computer runs, produces statistical reports to monitor the Academic Alert program, and distributes returned letters to the campus academic advisement offices. District Admissions and Registration Services purchases and distributes the continuous forms and progress roll forms, changes the form designs as necessary with approval of the Academic Alert Subcommittee, purchases envelopes with the College return address, and handles the mailing of Academic Alert letters through contractual arrangements with an outside vendor.

Campus registrars distribute progress rolls to the faculty, then collect and send the rolls for data-entry while Computer Operations prints the progress rolls and the RSVP letters. The Computer Application and Programming Department carries out the programming requests submitted by the Academic Alert Subcommittee and informs the subcommittee of system changes which have an impact on Academic Alert.

The costs of operating the Academic Alert system fall into four categories: computer operations, stationery, mailing, and personnel. It is difficult to obtain the pure cost of the program because all aspects of Academic Alert overlap with other College operations. Therefore, the expenses noted here are approximated. The greatest expense per term is attributable to mailing costs with approximately $8,400 spent each major term for a mailing agency contract and postage. Computer operations, including data entry and central processing, cost approximately $6,000. Personnel costs run approximately $2,500 for clerical, advisement, and faculty participation while stationery runs about $700 for progress rolls, letters, and envelopes. The total of $17,600 represents costs for one term and averages to $.44 per letter.

Needs for Evaluation

The most striking impact of the Academic Alert system is that faculty are encouraged to provide classroom assessment for students earlier in the term. As a result, faculty and students can make mid-term decisions about the students' academic progress (Losak, 1983). Students have time to improve their academic performance and attendance, and possibly avoid being placed in a SOAP category of poor standing at the end of the term.

A study of the Academic Alert system conducted by Miami-Dade's Computer-based Instructional Development and Research Office (Anandam, 1983) suggested that the system could be improved by providing more specific guidance to certain students. This was reinforced by analyses of students' academic withdrawal activities. Two groups composed of new and continuing students with ethnic representation of White non-Hispanic, Black non-Hispanic, and Hispanic students were divided into an experimental group (those receiving Academic Alert letters) and a control group (those not receiving Academic Alert letters). The mean cumulative credits dropped by the experimental group were 12.69 compared with 12.93 for the control group. The study also showed that one percent fewer students in the experimental group were placed on academic warning, probation, or suspension than in the control group.

The importance of evaluating the Academic Alert program lies in its effectiveness in encouraging satisfactory academic performance. Acceptance of the system has been growing, as indicated by positive responses from faculty and students using Academic Alert. The system has become an integral part of Miami-Dade's support for the general education reforms and SOAP.

As of the 1985 Winter Term, Academic Alert is in its seventh year of operation. While the system has provided advisement assistance for students

and faculty, no definitive studies have been conducted to determine its strengths and weaknesses. The present study afforded the opportunity to evaluate these areas in order to identify any needed changes and improvements.

STANDARDS OF ACADEMIC PROGRESS (SOAP)

Standards of Academic Progress (SOAP) is a major component of the College's effort to be more directive and to exert increased controls over students' academic careers while providing for early and continued assistance for those experiencing academic difficulty. SOAP relates directly to the two program goals noted in the earlier-cited report by Kelly and Anandam (1979): to develop a system to express Miami-Dade's moral obligation to its students resulting from the general education reforms and to provide better services to its students and thus prevent their suspension. SOAP also speaks directly to the 1974 Self-Study recommendation that the College provide information about all students for the purpose of advising them at successive stages of their academic careers.

The first aspect of the College's commitment to focus on the individual was the development of computerized information systems to serve as the fundamental vehicles for tracking individual performance and progress. SOAP monitors student performance and controls credit load once seven credits have been completed. The program provides a system of warning, probation, suspension, and, finally, dismissal in cases of low grade point average or excessive withdrawals from classes.

Also relevant is the unique population served by the College. The majority of present students on each of the four campuses is Hispanic. There are significant numbers of refugees representing more than ten nations. Fewer

than half of all students report English as their native language. Moreover, changes in the workplace have increased the academic skills required for most occupations. A large percentage of entering students are substantially deficient in academic skills, particularly in verbal and computational ability. The College works to assist the majority of these students to attain the high levels of academic achievement needed to fulfill their occupational goals and to succeed in upper-division studies following graduation.

SOAP was introduced in the Fall Term of 1978. Since that time, failure of students to maintain satisfactory academic performance has resulted in warning, probation, suspension, or dismissal from the College. Miami-Dade makes every effort to assist students in avoiding these sanctions, and especially to lessen their impact upon disadvantaged minorities, through Academic Alert, advisement, and remedial support programs. An injustice would result if such students were permitted to enroll term after term without significant improvements in their performance.

The SOAP standards are not intended to discourage or penalize students who are trying to make good use of the College's instructional resources. Rather, the College is committed to providing as much assistance as possible to students with academic difficulties. Students identified through SOAP are limited in the number of credits for which they can register, and are offered prescribed programs of intervention such as developmental studies, a study skills course, or career and personal counseling.

Stages of Development

SOAP developed in three stages. Each stage represented a refinement in the categories used for determining a student's academic status. Details of these categories are discussed and illustrated in the evaluation of SOAP in the third report of this volume.

Current Scope

The current SOAP program assesses the academic status of all students in credit courses at the end of each term and places each student in one of the SOAP categories. Activities of the SOAP system are coordinated by a collegewide student services committee composed of academic chairpersons, deans of students of the four campuses, and representatives from District Educational Services. The committee is responsible for establishing SOAP categories and credit limitations, updating the system, and monitoring it for consistency with College policies and procedures. At the end of each term, student transcript data are processed to identify the student's SOAP category. Each campus designs its own intervention strategies and appeal processes appropriate to its campus population and administrative structure.

The academic advisement department on each campus is responsible for the implementation and coordination of all SOAP programs. According to College policy, these departments must advise all students identified through the SOAP system on the appropriate selection of classes, making certain that credit limitations are observed and that intervention courses are included. Each student in a negative SOAP category can register only with the written approval of the academic advisement department.

Intervention strategies may include developmental and skill-building courses designed and conducted by departments other than academic advisement such as reading/writing courses by the English department and basic computational skills by the math department. Other strategies may include basic skills assessment by the testing department, and instruction in test-taking and time-management techniques by the counseling department. The SOAP appeals process may include input from and participation by other departments.

Program costs are absorbed by the various components of the delivery system. Each campus provides SOAP support resources such as academic advisement; career and personal counseling; reading, writing, math, and study-skill labs; and faculty conferences.

Needs for Evaluation

When the SOAP classifications were initiated in the Winter Term of 1978, there were large numbers of students with poor academic records in the system. The number (6,164) and percentage (14.2%) of students placed under SOAP during that term were unduly high (Losak, 1980). For the six major terms that followed, the percentage rate was lower and fairly constant as indicated in the following analysis of students in SOAP Categories:

FALL Term	Number	Percent	WINTER Term	Number	Percent
1979	4,940	11.6	1980	5,167	11.9
1980	4,636	10.6	1981	5,101	12.1
1981	4,681	11.1	1982	4,885	11.7
1982	5,910	14.1	1983	7,020	17.0
1983	6,718	16.0	1984	7,057	17.5

The numbers of students placed in SOAP Categories has included a significant decrease in the number of suspensions (currently below one percent) in each category. Consistent data indicate that approximately 83% of students in a 16-week major term at Miami-Dade are progressing in a satisfactory manner, according to the SOAP definition.

When the expanded SOAP categories went into effect at the beginning of the Fall Term of 1982, there was a shift in headcount among the various categories. Changes in the suspension guidelines resulted primarily in the elimination of

many students who, before the expansion of categories, would have been in suspension. The moving of students from suspension into a probation category, and into the suspension alert categories, has resulted in a considerable decrease in the suspension rate (Morris, et al, 1983). This was the intended result of the new policy. Data presented in the Morris report clearly indicate that SOAP contributed to improved student academic performance. Further, the suspension rate has declined each term since the Fall Term of 1981. Based on studies of the pool of students eligible for suspension, there is evidence that this decline reflects improved performance rather than relaxed standards for suspension or student departures from the College. Thus, there is substantial evidence that load restriction and other supportive measures are having their intended impact (McCabe, 1980).

The principle importance of the present evaluation of SOAP lies in the desirability of achieving a comprehensive assessment of whether this system has been soundly conceived, accurately targeted for achievement of its objectives, and effectively implemented.

COMMON RESEARCH METHOD OF THE STUDIES

Research Method

A single research method was common to all three of the Student Information and Performance Standards (SIPS) studies. It was formulated and implemented by the Collegewide SIPS Committee in sessions combining all campus delegations and study subcommittees, a member of the Office of Institutional Research (IR), two District resource persons, and the Self-Study Coordination Committee (SSCC) Advisor.

In formulating this research method, collegewide administrators, faculty, and staff were asked to write their concerns and reactions to AGIS, Academic Alert, and SOAP. The goals of the three systems were reviewed by the SIPS Committee to determine the objectives, issues, and strategies of the three systems. The committee then discussed what each system was intended to accomplish and decided to use questionnaire surveys as its main research strategies to study the effectiveness of the systems.

Research Instrument Design

The SIPS Committee generated questions to clarify various issues on AGIS, Academic Alert, and SOAP such as

- Percentage of students affected;
- Collegewide awareness of the goals and purposes of the systems;
- Users' understanding of the systems;
- Awareness of the intervention strategies; and
- Users' perception of the effectiveness of print-outs and interventions.

In addition, the surveys were intended to show how involved faculty and support staff were in generating and supporting these intervention systems and how deeply convinced they were of the effectiveness of these systems. Out of these identical concerns came tentative survey questions based largely on suggestions by administrators, faculty, staff, and students. These questions were modified as additional input was received. The SIPS Committee also submitted questions to the SSCC to survey segments of the external academic, political, business, and public service community. Identical, parallel, or different questions were asked of each target group. The following specific steps were taken by the SIPS Committee.

1. Tentative survey questions were listed.
2. Questions from past relevant studies were listed.
3. Questions were reviewed for modifications or rejections.
4. Additional questions were generated.
5. Questions were re-examined for duplication.
6. A pilot questionnaire was constructed.
7. The pilot questionnaire was field-tested on each campus to determine the clarity of questions.
8. Questions were removed and rewritten, and the instrument re-designed.
9. The final instruments were approved by the SSCC. These contained 62 questions for students, 58 for faculty, and 48 for administrators and staff.
10. Specific questions were designed for various community groups including College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) examinees, members of the Southeast Florida Educational Consortium, counselors in the Dade County School system, and recent Miami-Dade Alumni.

Target Group Selection

Demographic distinctions were made to distinguish among first and second year students; Black non-Hispanic, White non-Hispanic, and Hispanic students; and ages and years of service of faculty. Survey responses were processed with the SCANTRON because of its efficiency in reading and tabulating data. Surveys were administered to students in the Spring and the Fall Terms of 1984. The faculty was surveyed in the Fall Term of 1984 while the administrators and staff received questionnaires in the Summer Term of 1984. The surveyed population included one third of the entire College faculty, all College administrators and staff on duty during Summer 1984, and a stratified random sample of students enrolled in English courses spanning basic skills through advanced composition during the Spring and Fall Terms of 1984. English classes were chosen because they represented the best cross-section of students.

Committee Organization

The Collegewide SIPS Committee included the chairperson, the four SIPS campus delegations comprising the three study subcommittees, a member of IR, two District resource persons, and the SSCC advisor. Each campus delegation included a chairperson and a writer (both faculty), a resource person (faculty or staff), and an additional faculty member.

The SIPS Committee submitted all study plans, research instruments, and report drafts to the SSCC for review, reaction, and approval on an on-going basis. After the initial SIPS Committee meeting, it was decided that the campus groups would meet separately to complete their specific tasks and that

their chairpersons would convene on an on-going basis to share progress reports, to review and discuss new developments, and to consult with members of IR and with the District resource persons to organize strategies for action to be implemented by the campus group.

GENERAL FINDINGS

Together with numerous specific findings later presented in the individual reports, the Self-Study evaluations of AGIS, Academic Alert, and SOAP produced the following two broad findings:

(1) All target groups surveyed agreed that the three systems were useful and effective.

(2) A significant number of administrators, faculty, staff, and students (especially new students and faculty) were not familiar with the three systems, indicating a need for better communication regarding their purpose and applications.

STUDENT INFORMATION AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

PART 1

ADVISEMENT AND GRADUATION INFORMATION SYSTEM

(AGIS)

MIAMI-DADE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

1984 INSTITUTIONAL SELF-STUDY

ABSTRACT

The Advisement and Graduation Information System (AGIS) is one of three computerized academic student support systems developed by Miami-Dade Community College as part of the College's educational reforms of 1977. The system provides accurate, up-to-date, individualized information on each student's progress in meeting graduation requirements.

In evaluating the AGIS system, the AGIS Subcommittee of the Collegewide Student Information and Performance Standards (SIPS) Committee concerned itself primarily with assessing the program results, impact, and effectiveness of AGIS in achieving its goals. It focused on strengths, weaknesses, problems, and areas of disagreement in the system. The main study concerns were effectiveness of AGIS in advisement, levels of understanding of the AGIS system and its printouts, and determination of ways in which the system could be improved.

Data for the evaluation were obtained through surveys of administrators, faculty, staff, students, and community groups during the Spring, Summer, and Fall Terms of 1984. Survey responses were tabulated and reported in frequencies and percentages by the College's main computer system.

The study showed that the AGIS concept is generally well accepted by the personnel who utilize it. Its main strength is that it is an invaluable aid in the complex advisement process at the College. Its main weakness is insufficient dissemination of information about the system to its users.

The evaluation subcommittee recommended improvement in the dissemination of information about AGIS, additional training of students and personnel who use the AGIS system, and clarification of information concerning AGIS.

EVALUATION OF THE ADVISEMENT AND GRADUATION INFORMATION SYSTEM (AGIS)

DESCRIPTION OF THE SYSTEM

The Advisement and Graduation Information System (AGIS) is one of three computerized student support systems examined by the Student Information and Performance Standards (SIPS) Committee as part of the 1984 Institutional Self-Study. The study concerned itself with the levels of understanding, impact, and effectiveness of the AGIS system.

In response to its desire to improve the advisement process and information flow to students, Miami-Dade Community College developed the Advisement and Graduation Information System, commonly referred to as AGIS. Providing the core delivery system of information for academic advisement, AGIS is a computer-based system that is used to monitor students' progress as they proceed through the various degree programs at the College.

The system provides accurate, up-to-date information on the progress students are making toward meeting graduation requirements. It also informs students of specific courses suggested or required for the College's 74 Associate in Arts degree programs in order to transfer to the upper division in Florida universities and colleges. Additionally, it shows to what degree these suggestions or requirements are being followed.

AGIS's two major components are the Graduation Check and the Florida College Recommended Course outline.

Relation to Other Miami-Dade Reforms. Two parallel computerized student assistance and support systems also instituted at Miami-Dade as educational reforms since the mid-1970s are Academic Alert and the

Standards of Academic Progress (SOAP). Academic Alert is a computerized information system which generates a letter to every student each major term to provide mid-term feedback on performance in each course taken. SOAP is a formal process that identifies and provides needed assistance for students who experience academic difficulties. All three programs are designed to assist students with the assessment of their academic performance, obtaining specific assistance whenever necessary. All students may receive updated AGIS printouts anytime during the term to monitor progress and assist in their advisement for subsequent course selections. Academic Alert letters are mailed in the middle of each major term to all students, notifying them of progress in each course. SOAP tracks student performance after seven credits have been completed to identify and assist students having low grade point averages or excessive withdrawals from classes.

RESEARCH GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The three primary research goals of the AGIS Study Subcommittee were as follows:

1. To determine the effectiveness of AGIS in improving the advisement process;

2. To determine the levels of understanding which administrators, faculty, staff, and students possess regarding AGIS; and

3. To determine ways in which the AGIS system can be improved.

Key evaluation objectives which the AGIS Subcommittee addressed under these goals were the following:

1. To determine the effectiveness of AGIS in delivering the vital information it purports to provide.

2. To determine users' understanding of the AGIS components.

3. To identify the sources of assistance used for interpreting AGIS printouts.

4. To determine faculty comfort in providing academic advisement on the basis of AGIS reports.

5. To determine student satisfaction with AGIS printout information on their program status, graduation status, and requirements for transfer to senior institutions.

6. To determine whether the College should continue to fund the AGIS system.

7. To identify needed modifications or improvements in the AGIS system.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Most of the data presented in the following section were obtained from the four separate questionnaires completed by administrators, faculty, staff, and students during the Spring and Fall Terms of 1984. The surveys addressed the goals and objectives previously identified. A number of College studies and reports were also drawn upon as references.

Results from the various questionnaires are presented and analyzed in this section in both narrative and graphic form. Questions are dealt with in the sequence corresponding to the evaluation objectives.

The tables reflect the combining of responses Strongly Agree and Agree, and of Strongly Disagree and Disagree, into the categories of Agree and Disagree respectively. The Not Applicable or Don't Know responses are represented by N/A. The data in the tables are rounded to the whole decimal.

AGIS Effectiveness

When asked if AGIS reports effectively provided information about courses necessary for graduation requirements, the study's main target groups provided the responses indicated in Table 1-1. All groups agreed that the reports were effective in this respect, ranging from 83% of administrators and staff to a high of 90% for students. Responses of disagreement were as low as one percent for students surveyed in the Spring Term of 1984 and as high as 4% for those in the Fall Term of 1984.

TABLE 1-1

Effectiveness of AGIS Reports in Providing Information on Courses Required for Graduation from Miami-Dade

Responding Groups	N	Survey Responses Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Spring Students	385	[illegible]	1	9
Fall Students	777	89	4	7
Faculty	191	87	2	11
Administrators/Staff	322	83	3	14

When questions on AGIS were worded more specifically, agreement was slightly lower but still positive. When asked if advisement forms were signed for students who did not have copies of their AGIS printouts with them (see Table 1-2), more than one-fourth of all students and faculty replied with agreement. This seemed to be a high percentage since faculty and students can pick up AGIS printouts before the advisement process.

TABLE 1-2

Responses to Signing Advisement Forms for Students Not Presenting AGIS Reports to Their Advisors

Responding Groups	N	Survey Responses		
		Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Spring Students	385	29	49	22
Fall Students	777	28	50	22
Faculty	191	27	53	20
Administrators/Staff	322	11	33	56

When asked if AGIS printouts indicated everything students needed to know about their graduation or program status (see Tables 1-3 and 1-4 respectively), agreement ranged between 51% and 60%, and disagreement from 21% to 31%. The question on this point was phrased so strongly, using the word "everything," that responses were not as strong in agreement as with other statements.

TABLE 1-3

Effectiveness of AGIS Printout in Providing All Necessary Information on Student's Graduation Status

Responding Groups	N	Survey Responses		
		Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Spring Students	385	59	29	12
Fall Students	777	64	24	12
Faculty	191	51	31	18
Administrators/Staff	322	52	23	25

TABLE 1-4

Effectiveness of AGIS Printout in Providing All Necessary Information on Student's Program Status

Responding Groups	N	Survey Responses		
		Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Spring Students	385	60	26	14
Fall Students	777	60	26	14
Faculty	191	53	29	18
Administrators/Staff	322	56	21	23

When asked if there were sufficient accurate information was available to help students with questions about AGIS (see Table 1-5), 25% of the faculty and 26% of administrators and staff replied negatively. This figure appears somewhat high and would indicate a need for determining what information or training may assist these groups to advise students more effectively.

TABLE 1-5

Adequacy of AGIS Information for Answering Students' Questions

Responding Groups	N	Survey Responses		
		Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Faculty	191	62	25	13
Administrators/Staff	322	39	26	35

When administrators, faculty, and staff were asked where they learned of the latest changes in AGIS (see Table 1-6), most indicated from the AGIS report itself. Very few mentioned their academic or associate deans while 26% of the faculty indicated "other faculty or chairperson." This tends to identify a communication problem in not getting information of AGIS changes to these user groups before they see them on the AGIS forms.

TABLE 1-6

Sources for Learning About Changes in AGIS

Responding Groups	N	Survey Responses: Academic/ Associate Dean %	Other Faculty or Chair-person %	Academic Advisors %	AGIS Report %	Students %	Other %
Faculty	191	4	26	18	28	N/A	24
Administrators/Staff	322	13	12	26	43	6	N/A

All groups indicated that they seek help from academic advisors when they require assistance interpreting AGIS printouts (see Table 1-7).

TABLE 1-7

Resources for Interpreting AGIS

Responding Groups	N	Survey Responses: Friend %	Student %	Faculty Advisor %	Academic Advisor %	Department %	Other Faculty %	Other %	N/A %
Spring Students	385	11	9	22	53	N/A	N/A	5	N/A
Fall Students	777	12	9	22	47	N/A	N/A	10	N/A
Faculty	191	N/A	N/A	N/A	38	19	20	11	12
Administrators/ Staff	322	N/A	N/A	N/A	46	9	14	10	21

Approximately 80% of all groups responded that the College should continue to spend money to maintain the AGIS system (see Table 1-8) with a high of only 9% of the students from the Fall Term of 1984 replying negatively.

TABLE 1-8

Miami-Dade Spending Money to Maintain AGIS

Responding Groups	N	Survey Responses: Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Spring Students	385	84	5	11
Fall Students	777	80	9	11
Faculty	191	79	6	15
Administrators/ Staff	322	75	5	20

Understanding of AGIS

When asked if the AGIS printout was understandable without any help (see Table 1-9), all groups responded approximately two to one affirmatively. Students from the Fall Term of 1984, which included a higher proportion of first-term students, accounted for the highest amount of disagreement at 29%.

TABLE 1-9

Ease of Understanding AGIS Without Assistance

Responding Groups	N	Survey Responses		
		Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Spring Students	385	64	24	12
Fall Students	777	61	29	10
Faculty	191	64	23	13
Administrators/ Staff	322	58	25	17

When asked about understanding the various AGIS report components outlining courses required for degrees, all groups understood the major course requirements and the general education core course requirements at about a 70% agreement level (see Tables 1-10 and 1-11 respectively).

TABLE 1-10

Understanding Major Course Requirements Listed on AGIS

Responding Groups	N	Survey Responses: Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Spring Students	385	72	16	12
Fall Students	777	73	17	10
Faculty	191	74	11	15
Administrators/ Staff	322	70	10	20

TABLE 1-11

Understanding General Education Core Course Requirements Listed on AGIS

Responding Groups	N	Survey Responses: Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Spring Students	385	75	11	14
Fall Students	777	70	17	13
Faculty	191	72	14	14
Administrators/ Staff	322	60	15	25

General education distribution course requirements were understood to a slightly lesser extent (see Table 1-12), followed by elective course requirements at approximately 60% (see Table 1-13).

TABLE 1-12

Understanding General Education Distribution Course Requirements Listed on AGIS

Responding Groups	N	Survey Responses: Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Spring Students	385	64	21	15
Fall Students	777	62	23	15
Faculty	191	70	15	15
Administrators/ Staff	322	57	18	25

TABLE 1-13

Understanding Elective Courses Listed on AGIS

Responding Groups	N	Survey Responses: Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Spring Students	385	56	32	12
Fall Students	777	63	26	11
Faculty	191	59	24	17
Administrators/ Staff	322	60	18	22

Needed Improvements

Three survey items dealt with improvement of AGIS by asking target groups to respond in open-ended formats. Faculty were asked for general comments on the strengths and weaknesses of AGIS as well as for recommendations for improvement. Twenty-one faculty members responded with all but two expressing approval of AGIS. Of suggested improvements, the one most frequently mentioned was for academic advisement to conduct more workshops to provide better information for all AGIS users on how to understand the forms and system. Others asked for course titles to be included in some components in addition to the course numbers presently given. Others said they were not familiar with the AGIS system, and a few thought its terminology could be written more clearly or concisely, using a format more easily understood.

The administration and staff survey asked respondents what single major change within the last ten years they thought had the most positive impact on the College. Of 170 replies, 15% mentioned AGIS--the response most often mentioned.

The questionnaire sent to 207 recent Miami-Dade graduates asked them to comment on positive and negative aspects of AGIS which could help improve the system. Of 64 respondents who had completed Associate in Arts programs, 82% replied with positive comments on AGIS. From the smaller number (13) of recent Associate in Science graduates responding, a comparable proportion (77%) indicated approval of the system.

Supplemental Data

In two demographic questions, 81% of the administrator and staff respondents said they had seen an AGIS report. Fifteen percent said

they had not while 4% did not respond to this item. When asked how many students they usually advise per term, 13% of faculty replied none; 13% indicated one to ten students; 22% said 11 to 20; 25%, 21 to 50; and 27%, more than 50. Administrators and staff answered the same question with 41% advising no students; 15%, one to ten; 7%, 21 to 50; and 30%, more than 50.

When students were asked if AGIS was helpful during their academic advisement interviews, 60% responded with agreement, 18% disagreed, and 22% gave no opinion. When asked if they felt that AGIS provided additional information for transfer to senior institutions in Florida, 53% agreed, 25% disagreed, and 22% had no opinion.

Responses to the three items on the supplemental administrators and staff survey indicated that 57% agreed that AGIS was helpful in improving students' academic progress with 21% disagreeing and 22% having no response. When asked if they felt that AGIS led to less contact with students, 27% agreed that it had, 42% thought it had not, and 31% felt it had not affected them either way. When asked if they felt that the College should continue using AGIS, 72% felt that it should, 12% felt it should not, and 16% had no response or preference. These results, in general, tend to confirm similar levels of satisfaction with AGIS which the other survey groups expressed.

CONCLUSIONS

The subcommittee concluded that, in general, all target groups surveyed agreed that the AGIS system was useful and effective in meeting its intended objectives. They also agreed that it was worth the expense to the College to maintain AGIS. However, some administrators, faculty, staff, and students, especially new students and faculty, were not fully familiar with the system. This indicated a need for better information dissemination and communication regarding AGIS usage and changes.

It was also concluded that faculty need more training on AGIS usage. This should lead to an increased amount and improved quality of advisement of students by faculty. The AGIS Subcommittee also concluded that although AGIS was an invaluable aid in advisement, certain components were not easily understood and should be modified for clarity. It was also concluded that the AGIS system should include additional information to improve advisement.

Further analyses of the study's questionnaire data may be found in the separate reference files for this study. These also contain copies of all research instruments, data printouts, and other pertinent background documentation.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROJECTIONS

The following recommendations are those which the AGIS Study Subcommittee considered most significant. Each is accompanied by the plan and timetable projected for its implementation.

Recommendation 1: Faculty should have better access to information regarding AGIS.

Orientation and training sessions, especially for new faculty, need to be provided readily and conveniently, and improved reference information on AGIS usage should be included in the Faculty Advisors' Handbook.

Recommendation 2: Dissemination of information on changes in the AGIS system needs to be improved.

At present, most users find out about such changes primarily by seeing them on the AGIS forms.

Each Campus Vice President will clarify and publish information concerning channels of communication needed for more effective dissemination of information on changes in the AGIS system. These channels of communication will ensure that all faculty and staff dealing with students are kept apprised of the latest information prior to its appearance on AGIS forms.

Arrangements will be made for these channels of communication to become operational by the end of the 1984-1985 academic year.

Recommendation 3: Faculty should become more active in academic advisement.

With faculty better informed on usages of AGIS, they will become more comfortable with their advisement roles; students will be more comfortable in seeking departmental advisement; and student-faculty contact and relations will improve.

The College will schedule a series of workshops to train and orient administrators, faculty, and staff on the AGIS system. The workshops will be designed and implemented by the student services area on each campus. Upon completion of the workshops, attendees will have developed competency in the use of AGIS reports for advisement. The pilot workshops will be developed in the Fall Term of 1985 and will be scheduled on a regular basis beginning with the Winter Term of 1986.

Recommendation 4: Students should receive specific information on reading and understanding the AGIS printout as an aid in self-advisement.

Student services on each campus will ensure that the advisement sessions for new students include more extensive information about AGIS, including review of samples of AGIS printouts. These new advisement sessions will begin in the 1985-1986 academic year.

Recommendation 5: In addition to students' raw scores on their placement exams, the AGIS printout should include other testing information such as alternate test scores, cutoffs and prescriptive implications, and CLAST status.

Recommendation 6: As soon as possible, the College should implement Phase Seven of AGIS development, the sequencing of courses students must take to satisfy degree requirements for particular programs of study.

Recommendation 7: Elective course offerings and, to a somewhat lesser extent, distribution course requirements, should be made more understandable on the AGIS printout.

Recommendation 8: The AGIS printout should be made more user-friendly.

The Vice President for Education will establish a task force to evaluate the information presented on AGIS forms. This task force will include faculty members, a student services advisor, a member with policy-making authority, an AGIS programmer from Computer Application and Programming, and the curriculum specialist from the Office of the Vice President for Education. This committee will consider adding test scores, course sequencing, and elective course offerings to the AGIS report. The task force will be formed by the Fall Term of 1985 and will provide its recommendations for further action by the end of the Winter Term of 1986.

Recommendation 9: The College should continue to expend the funds necessary to maintain and improve the AGIS system.

The President of Miami-Dade will assure that the College will continue to devote the resources necessary to maintain and improve the AGIS system as recommended by this study.

STUDENT INFORMATION AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

PART 2

ACADEMIC ALERT

MIAMI-DADE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

1984 INSTITUTIONAL SELF-STUDY

ABSTRACT

Academic Alert is one of three computerized student support systems developed by Miami-Dade Community College as part of the Educational Reforms of 1977. The system involves sending students a mid-term progress report of their academic performance and attendance along with a prescription for improving any problem areas.

This study examined the impact, effectiveness, and acceptance of Academic Alert by Miami-Dade administrators, faculty, staff, and students as well as various community groups. The main objectives dealt with the effect of Academic Alert letters on end-of-term grades and course retention, the timeliness of the Academic Alert message, and the perceptions of the Academic Alert system by administrators, faculty, staff, and students. The key issues were the impact of Academic Alert on student academic success, the use of Academic Alert by faculty, and the support systems utilized after Academic Alert letters are sent.

The data were obtained from survey responses of administrators, faculty, staff, students, and community groups; previous Academic Alert studies; and student interviews. The surveys were tabulated and reported in frequency and percentages by computer, and analyzed by the Student Information and Performance Standards (SIPS) Committee.

The study showed that the Academic Alert concept is accepted by administrators, faculty, staff, students, and community groups. The main weaknesses in the system include the lack of collegewide standards for evaluating academic performance and attendance; vagueness of terms used to convey the evaluations to the students; and poor working knowledge of the system by administrators, faculty, staff, and students.

The committee recommends the establishment of common standards for evaluating academic performance and attendance; the use of more detailed terms to convey the evaluations to students; and better communication about the Academic Alert system to administrators, faculty, staff, and students.

Future plans include establishing standards for evaluating academic performance and attendance, requiring an orientation course for entering freshmen, and conducting Academic Alert workshops for administrators, faculty, and staff.

EVALUATION OF THE ACADEMIC ALERT SYSTEM

DESCRIPTION OF THE SYSTEM

Academic Alert is one of three computerized student support systems examined by the Student Information and Performance Standards (SIPS) Collegewide Committee as part of the Miami-Dade Community College 1984 Self-Study. This study concentrated on the acceptance, impact, and effectiveness of the Academic Alert system.

The Academic Alert system is an integral part of the new general education reforms as a vehicle for offering better services to Miami-Dade students by informing them at mid-term of any academic problems. In the first year of operation of the Standards of Academic Progress (SOAP), Miami-Dade suspended 3,410 students for insufficient academic performance (Kelly and Anandam, 1979). Academic Alert is one method for preventing such mass suspensions.

The recently instituted general education package also requires students to demonstrate minimum levels of proficiency before enrolling in certain required courses or before receiving an associate degree (Miami-Dade Community College, 1979). The Academic Alert letter gives classroom instructors the opportunity to inform students of such deficiencies, particularly in the basic skills areas of reading, writing, and computation. The Academic Alert letter automatically selects the messages to refer students to areas in which they can receive individualized assistance and advisement.

All Academic Alert letters use the student's first name in the salutation and in the body of the letter for a personal touch. New students receive a different opening paragraph from those for returning students; the opening paragraphs also differ for students on each of the four campuses. The

student's academic performance and attendance are reported with messages appropriate to the student's status. Suggestions for resource areas are also included. With almost 27,000 different messages available in the Academic Alert system, students receive a highly personalized letter reflecting their individual circumstances and needs. Although preliminary assessment of the Academic Alert system indicated that students markedly improve their performance after receiving Academic Alert letters (particularly when they take advantage of the special support services offered to them), a more detailed study was necessary to evaluate the full impact of the Academic Alert system on student academic performance. This Self-Study report offered such an opportunity.

RESEARCH GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Program Results, Impact, and Effectiveness in Achieving Its Goals

The impact, effectiveness, and acceptance of the Academic Alert system represent major elements of this study. Goal One and Goal Two contain objectives by which these aspects of Academic Alert can be evaluated. These goals and objectives are listed below.

Goal One: To determine the impact of the Academic Alert system.

- Objective One: To determine the effect of Academic Alert letters on end-of-term grades and course retention.
- Objective Two: To determine the impact of Academic Alert on students' cumulative SOAP standing.

Goal Two: To determine the effectiveness of the Academic Alert system.

- Objective One: To determine the timeliness of the Academic Alert message.
- Objective Two: To determine administrative, faculty, staff, and student understanding of the Academic Alert message.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Problems, and Areas of Disagreement

The strengths, weaknesses, problems, and areas of disagreement of the Academic Alert system represent the remaining significant concerns of this study. These aspects of the Academic Alert system have not been previously evaluated; they provide firm basis for recommending changes in the system. Goal One and Goal Two also contain objectives by which these aspects of Academic Alert can be evaluated. Goal Three objectives complete the evaluation. The goals and objectives for this section are as follows.

Goal One: To determine the impact of the Academic Alert system.

Objective Three: To determine the extent of Academic Alert follow-up support systems.

Goal Two: To determine the effectiveness of the Academic Alert system.

Objective Three: To determine the level of achievement and attendance used by faculty in reporting students on Academic Alert rolls.

Goal Three: To determine the acceptance of the Academic Alert system.

Objective One: To determine how administrators, faculty, staff, and students perceive the Academic Alert system.

Objective Two: To determine whether students follow up on the Academic Alert message.

Objective Three: To determine the administrative, faculty, staff, student reaction to the Academic Alert concept.

Objective Four: To determine community reaction to the strategy utilized by the Academic Alert concept.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Most of the data in this section were obtained from four separate questionnaires which were completed by administrators, faculty, staff, and students in the Spring and Fall terms of 1984. The questionnaires addressed the goals and objectives previously listed in the study goals and objectives section. Some data were also drawn from previous College studies. A few questions related to Academic Alert appeared on the community questionnaires. These results are discussed at the end of the data analysis section.

The tables reflect the combining of responses Strongly Agree and Agree, and of Strongly Disagree and Disagree, into the categories of Agree and Disagree respectively. The Not Applicable or Don't Know responses are represented by N/A. The data in the tables are rounded to the whole decimal.

Effect of Academic Alert Letters on End-of-Term Grades and Course Retention

From 46% to 51% of the administrators, faculty, staff, and students agreed that the Academic Alert letters have helped students maintain satisfactory academic performance. These figures indicated strong acceptance by the respondents because 24% to 34% of each group indicated they did not have enough knowledge or feel strongly enough to answer positively or negatively. Negative responses ranged from 16% to 24% in the groups surveyed. The acceptance of the system was further verified by the parallel results of the collegewide administrators/staff survey.

Impact of Academic Alert on Students' Cumulative SOAP Standing

The results of Anandam's 1983-84 study of Academic Alert showed that the cumulative GPA for the experimental group (those receiving Academic Alert letters) was 2.46 compared with the 2.45 cumulative GPA of the control group (those not receiving Academic Alert letters). Of the experimental group, 19% fell into negative SOAP categories at end-of-term grades compared with 20% of the control group. Both the experimental and the control group had 20% of the students in negative SOAP categories based on the cumulative GPA (Anandam, 1984). The study showed a positive effect of Academic Alert on student academic performance in a term. With the 20% SOAP figure in both the experimental and control groups, the long-term effects of the Academic Alert letter might be assumed because the control group maintained the same number of negative SOAP students as the experimental group.

Timeliness of the Academic Alert Message

The administrators, faculty, staff, and students strongly agreed that it is important to notify students by mid-term if the student's academic performance is not satisfactory. Positive responses were recorded for 82% of administrators and staff, 83% of spring students, 84% of fall students, and 89% of the faculty. All groups further approved of the mid-term mailing with their positive responses to the time the letter is sent. The majority of each group thought the letter was sent at the right time with the responses from the faculty at 64% showing the strongest support. Fall students had the highest responses (30%) that the letter is sent too late while faculty had the most responses (19%) that it is sent too early. During student interviews, the request for Academic Alert letters for spring and summer terms was frequently made.

Understanding of Academic Alert Letters

The majority of all groups thought the format of the Academic Alert letter is easy to understand with 76% of the faculty showing positive responses. The lowest percentage (51%) of positive responses came from the fall students. This group included a large number of new students who had not yet received an Academic Alert letter and, therefore, were not familiar with the format. The fall group also included students who entered in the spring and summer terms when no Academic Alert letters are sent.

The ease in understanding was also shown in the positive responses by students who understood why their instructors indicated that they needed improvement. The positive responses were 50% for spring students and 47% for fall students. These responses were more supportive than they first appeared because of the number of new students included in each group, as previously discussed, and because of the number of students who received letters indicating no need for improvement in any of their classes.

Academic Alert Follow-Up Support Systems

When asked if they had sufficient information to help students with questions about Academic Alert, the administrators/staff showed only 34% positive responses. This question was asked only on the administrators/staff questionnaire because they have the least amount of contact with the Academic Alert system. The faculty provides input by completing the academic progress rolls while the students receive the letters. The most positive responses came from those administrators/staff who had been at Miami-Dade for four years or more. Their responses ranged from 30% of the 8-to-12-years employees to 41% of the 13-years-plus group. These employees, who had been with Miami-Dade since the inception of Academic Alert, should have a better understanding of the system than more recent employees.

Table 2-1 shows that the most informed groups are the full-time student services staff and the administrators (53% and 50% respectively). These groups have the most contact with the Academic Alert system through their job responsibilities.

TABLE 2-1

Administrators and Staff Indicating Sufficient Information to Help Students with Academic Alert Questions (N = 322)

Responding Groups	Survey Responses		
	Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Department/Associate Deans' Secretaries	39	13	48
Full-time Student Services Staff	53	37	9
Administrators	50	28	21
Classified Staff	23	30	46
Other	32	17	51

The responses from both the spring and fall students showed a low level of satisfaction with the help they received. Spring students showed 53% satisfaction while 40% of the fall students responded positively. As noted on previous items, there is a high percentage (31% for spring; 41% for fall) of students who indicated they were unable to answer the question. Most of these students had not received Academic Alert letters.

Table 2-2 illustrates that, of the students who were satisfied with the help they received, the most satisfied students were Black non-Hispanic and

Hispanic. The high positive responses from these groups were explained by their high percentages of students needing improvement in courses. The difference in grade point averages was further illustrated by Anandam's 1984 study. The GPA by term for White non-Hispanic was 2.60; for Black non-Hispanic, 1.97; and for Hispanic, 2.21.

TABLE 2-2

Ethnic Classification of Students Satisfied with Help Following Receipt of Academic Alert Letters

Ethnic Classification	Survey Responses	
	Spring (N=385) %	Fall (N=777) %
Black Non-Hispanic	66	48
White Non-Hispanic	32	31
Hispanic	58	41
Other	50	44

Tables 2-3 and 2-4 indicate that the most help was received and initiated by the students themselves followed by the instructors in both categories. The high percentages of N/A responses in both terms was explained by the high percentage of White non-Hispanic students who did not need help in maintaining satisfactory academic performance.

TABLE 2-3

Resources Used by Students Receiving Academic Alert Letters

Students by Term	N	Resources Used				
		Self %	Instructor %	Counselor/ Advisor %	Other %	N/A %
Spring	385	37	22	7	5	29
Fall	777	28	22	9	6	36

TABLE 2-4

Resources Initiating Help for Students Receiving Academic Alert Letter

Students by Term	N	Resources Initiating Help				
		Self %	Instructor %	Counselor/ Advisor %	Other %	N/A %
Spring	385	35	21	8	7	29
Fall	777	30	19	9	6	36

Tables 2-5 and 2-6 further illustrate the greater percentage of Black non-Hispanics and Hispanics receiving and initiating help as a result of the Academic Alert letter. The high percentage of N/A responses from White non-Hispanics compared with the high percentages of Black non-Hispanics and Hispanics needing help supported the historical statistics that Black non-Hispanics and Hispanics experience more academic difficulties than White non-Hispanics.

TABLE 2-5

Ethnic Classification of Students Satisfied with Help Following Receipt of Academic Alert Letter (N = 385-Spring; 777-Fall)

	Students Satisfied with Help				
Student Groups	Self %	Instructor %	Counselor %	Other %	N/A %
Black Non-Hispanic					
Spring	31	37	6	6	20
Fall	22	28	15	8	27
White Non-Hispanic					
Spring	29	14	9	1	47
Fall	28	13	6	5	46
Hispanic					
Spring	41	23	6	7	23
Fall	31	22	7	5	35
Other					
Spring	37	20	13	3	27
Fall	21	23	9	8	40

TABLE 2-6

Resources Initiating Help For Ethnic Groups Receiving Academic Alert Letter (N = 385 Spring; 777 Fall)

	Resources Initiating Help				
Student Groups	Self %	Instructor %	Counselor %	Other %	N/A %
Black Non-Hispanic					
Spring	29	33	6	10	22
Fall	23	28	15	7	27
White Non-Hispanic					
Spring	29	9	9	4	48
Fall	26	15	7	6	46
Hispanic					
Spring	39	23	8	8	23
Fall	34	16	8	6	35
Other					
Spring	33	27	13	7	20
Fall	34	19	4	6	38

Students also felt that feedback from their instructors was as effective as an Academic Alert letter. Both spring (67%) and fall (66%) students supported this concept with positive responses increasing proportionately with the length of time a student attends Miami-Dade (see Table 2-7).

TABLE 2-7

Student Responses to Effectiveness of Instructors' Feedback Versus Academic Alert Letters by Terms of Attendance

Student Responses by Terms	N	Terms of Attendance				
		1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 or more %
Spring Students	385					
Positive Responses		51	73	69	68	71
N/A		34	4	12	7	8
Fall Students	777					
Positive Responses		59	57	69	63	70
N/A		28	7	11	14	15

Levels of Achievement Used By Faculty in Reporting Students on Academic Alert Rolls

Responses showed that the faculty used different levels of performance to indicate a student's work needed improvement. As Table 2-8 illustrates, the most common grade level (62%) for needing improvement was D, but 25% of the faculty used C. Table 2-9 shows that 75% of associate professors senior and 64% of associate professors most often used D as the level of performance needing improvement while only 50% of the assistant professors used D. Table 2-10 shows that faculty employed four to seven years used a different grade pattern than other faculty for indicating students' work needed improvement.

TABLE 2-8

Highest Level of Performance Used by Instructors to Indicate Needed Improvement in Student's Work (N = 191)

Highest Grade Used	Percentage of Instructors
F	4
D	62
C	25
B	2
N/A	7

TABLE 2-9

Highest Level of Performance Used by Instructors to Indicate Needed Improvements in Students' Work by Academic Rank (N = 191)

Highest Grade Used	Academic Rank				
	Instructor %	Assistant Professor %	Associate Professor %	Associate Professor Sr. %	Professor %
F	8	4	0	3	4
D	58	50	64	75	62
C	29	36	29	19	22
B	3	7	0	0	0
N/A	3	4	7	3	13

TABLE 2-10

Highest Level of Performance Used by Instructors to Indicate Needed Improvement in Students' Work by Length of Service (N = 191)

Highest Grade Used	Length of Service				
	Less than 1 year %	1-3 years %	4-7 years %	8-12 years %	More than 13 years %
F	0	0	3	8	3
D	67	65	47	68	66
C	0	29	39	22	22
B	0	6	6	0	0
N/A	33	0	6	3	10

In answer to the question of what percent of their students needed improvement at mid-term in the fall or winter term, 42% of the faculty showed 0% to 19% while 40% showed 20% to 39%. These figures represented overall faculty responses.

Levels of Attendance Used by Faculty in Reporting Student on Academic Alert Roles

Table 2-11 shows inconsistency among faculty in determining how many absences from a lecture course were considered to be unsatisfactory with 59% of the faculty using three to four absences as their criterion.

TABLE 2-11

Number of Absences Used by Instructors to Indicate Unsatisfactory Student Attendance in Lecture Courses (N = 191)

Number of Absences	Percentages
1 - 2	12
3 - 4	59
5 - 6	15
7	3
No lecture course	10

Table 2-12 shows the inconsistency among campuses in determining how many absences from a lecture course were considered to be unsatisfactory. While three to four absences drew the most responses on each campus, 37% of Medical Campus faculty used one to two absences while 27% of South Campus faculty used five to six absences.

TABLE 2-12

Number of Absences Used by Instructors to Indicate Unsatisfactory Student Attendance in Lecture Courses by Campus (N = 191)

Number of Absences	Campus			
	North %	South %	Wolfson %	Medical %
1 - 2	10	6	3	37
3 - 4	71	54	70	40
5 - 6	12	27	16	3
7	3	2	5	0
No lecture course	3	12	5	20

Table 2-13 further illustrates the inconsistency in determining an unsatisfactory number of absences by discipline. All disciplines used three to four absences as their main criterion. No core course faculty used more than four absences while at least 25% of the communications, math, and ESL faculty used five to seven absences as their criterion.

TABLE 2-13

Number of Absences Used by Instructors to Indicate Unsatisfactory Student Attendance in Lecture Courses by Discipline (N = 191)

Number of Absences	Discipline of Instructors				
	Communication/ Language Arts %	Math %	Core Courses %	ESL %	Other %
1 - 2	7	0	14	5	16
3 - 4	61	67	86	58	51
5 - 6	28	20	0	16	15
7	0	7	0	11	2
No lecture course	4	7	0	11	15

Table 2-14 shows that 27% of the faculty used three to four absences in a lab as their criterion for unsatisfactory attendance.

TABLE 2-14

Number of Absences Used by Instructors to Indicate Unsatisfactory Student Attendance in Labs (N = 191)

Number of Absences	Percentages
1 - 2	19
3 - 4	27
5 - 6	5
7	0
No lab course	49

Table 2-15 shows inconsistency again existed among campuses with 67% of Medical Campus using one to two absences as their criterion for evaluating lab absences while most other campuses used three to four. The differences among campuses and disciplines could lie in the types of courses which are taught at the different locations. Medical Campus programs contain more lab and intern courses than those on other campuses. "Labs" could also range from science and math labs to reading and language labs. The differences could also lie in the lack of a College policy on class attendance.

TABLE 2-15

Number of Absences Used by Instructors to Indicate Unsatisfactory Student Attendance in Labs by Campus (N = 191)

Number of Absences	Instructor's Campus			
	North %	South %	Wolfson %	Medical %
1 - 2	9	11	8	67
3 - 4	39	22	27	13
5 - 6	3	5	8	3
7	0	0	0	0
No lab courses	48	61	57	17

Administrators, Faculty, Staff, and Student Perceptions of Academic Alert System

Of the faculty and administrators/staff surveyed, 79% of the faculty had seen an Academic Alert letter as had 66% of the administrators/staff. The higher percentage of positive responses by faculty may lie in their more active role in the Academic Alert system. The 18% of the faculty who had not seen an Academic Alert letter may be librarians, counselors, or other student services/non-teaching faculty.

There was mixed support from faculty and administrators/staff for sending a letter to every student whether progress is unsatisfactory or not. The faculty responses showed 40% for and 49% against this practice. The administrators/staff responses showed 49% for and 31% against sending the letters.

The faculty and administrators/staff also did not support sending more than one letter a term. Faculty responses showed 72% against this practice while 50% of the administrators/staff showed negative responses.

Responses from both the spring and fall students showed that students were unaware of the Academic Alert system before they received their first letter. The similar percentage of negative votes from spring (48%) and fall (46%) students indicated that this was a consistent lack of awareness.

Both groups of students also agreed that the Academic Alert letter is the right length. The spring students (52%) and fall students (49%) showed similar percentages of positive responses to this question. Twenty-two percent and 20% of the same groups thought the letter was too short; 7% and 6% thought it was too long.

Student Follow Up on Academic Alert Message

The responses showed that 46% of the spring students and 38% of the fall students talked with their instructors to determine why they received unsatisfactory ratings. These percentages were not as low as they appeared because 25% of all students surveyed were in their first term and had never received an Academic Alert letter. Also included in the survey were many students who received satisfactory ratings in all their classes. The students' willingness to talk with their instructors reinforces earlier findings in which students felt instructor feedback was as effective as an Academic Alert letter.

According to Table 2-16, 37% of both spring and fall students improved their performance as a result of receiving an Academic Alert letter. The high percentage of non-responses was again explained by new students responding to the survey.

TABLE 2-16

Actions Taken by Students Receiving an Academic Alert Letter by Terms

Actions Taken	Terms in Which Students Were Surveyed	
	Spring (N=385) %	Fall (N=777) %
Dropped course	8	6
Improved attendance	7	11
Improved performance	37	37
Felt I was doing O.K. (spring)	14	0
Ignored the message (fall)	0	4
Other	34	41

Administrators, Faculty, Staff, and Student Reaction to the Academic Alert Concept

The administrators, faculty, staff, and students showed great understanding of the purpose of Academic Alert. All groups gave high percentages of positive responses with the faculty (89%) showing the greatest understanding. The fall students showed the least understanding (68%), probably based on the large percentage of new students.

The administrators, faculty, staff, and students also strongly agreed that the Academic Alert letters mailed to students' homes were an effective means of notifying students of their academic performance. The positive responses ranged from 63% of administrators/staff to 70% of the spring students.

The administrators, faculty, and staff felt that student/faculty conferences were a more effective means of notifying students of their

academic performance than the Academic Alert letter. The positive faculty responses totaled 60% while the administrators/staff showed 51% positive responses. The large numbers of students and the disproportionately small number of advisors make the option of exclusive use of faculty/student conferences prohibitive. These attitudes, however, correlated with the earlier suggestion by students that instructor feedback was as effective as an Academic Alert letter.

All groups agreed that Miami-Dade should continue to spend money to maintain the Academic Alert system. The support ranged from 60% of the administrators and staff to 77% of the fall students. Twenty-five percent of the faculty gave negative responses and 24% of the administration and staff had no opinion. The supplemental collegewide administrator/staff survey results correlated with these findings with 72% support.

The students strongly supported identifying levels of superior academic performance with 75% of the spring students and 73% of the fall students giving positive responses. The opinion was reinforced by students who were interviewed in randomly selected classes. Those students objected to the use of "satisfactory" to describe academic performance ranging from A to D. These reactions also correlated with the discovery that no standard exists by which faculty can evaluate students. Positive reinforcement for students who are doing superior work would be much more effective than the feedback used by the current Academic Alert system.

The students also indicated strong support for sending out Academic Alert letters each term. Spring students showed 83% support while fall students gave 78% support.

Community Reaction to the Strategy Utilized by the Academic Alert Concept

Table 2-17 illustrates the support of community groups for sending the Academic Alert letter to students' homes at mid-term. The most support came from community agencies (69%) and the Miami-Dade occupational advisory committees (66%).

TABLE 2-17

Responses of Community Groups to the Academic Alert Concept

Community Groups		Responses					
		Agree		Disagree		N/A	
	N	N	%	N	%	N	%
High School Counselors	55	30	54	21	38	4	7
Southeast Florida Education Consortium	64	28	43	26	40	10	15
Major Dade County Employers	35	19	54	12	34	4	11
Supplementary Agencies	16	11	69	4	25	1	6
Politicians	17	11	65	6	35	0	0
Miami-Dade Graduates	207	124	60	71	34	12	6
Occupational Advisory Committees	103	68	66	29	28	6	6

CONCLUSIONS

The Academic Alert Study subcommittee concluded that the Academic Alert system has had a positive impact on the students' academic performance. The timeliness of the mailing and the format of the letter have assisted students in identifying academic and attendance problems early enough in the term to take appropriate action.

The subcommittee also concluded that administrators, faculty, staff, and students need more information about the Academic Alert support systems so appropriate referrals can be made. New students and new Miami-Dade employees show the least amount of knowledge about the system, indicating a lack of effective orientation to this system at Miami-Dade.

The subcommittee further concluded that greater interaction between faculty and students would bring improved academic performance. The support of faculty conferences and the Academic Alert system by both students and Miami-Dade personnel indicates that a combination of both systems would greatly benefit students.

It was also concluded that Black non-Hispanic and Hispanic students need more individual attention than White non-Hispanic students to maintain satisfactory academic performance.

The subcommittee concluded that no collegewide standard exists for evaluating academic performance or attendance. The resulting lack of consistency in the evaluation process leads to confusion when students receive their Academic Alert letters. The terms "satisfactory" and "needs improvement" are vague. Students wish to receive more accurate messages about their academic performance and attendance. They also want Academic Alert letters to reflect the specific levels of their academic achievement.

Based on the findings of this study, the subcommittee concluded that Miami-Dade should continue the Academic Alert system.

Further analysis of the study's questionnaire data may be found in the separate reference files for this study. These also contain copies of all research instruments, data printouts, and other pertinent background documentation.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROJECTIONS

The following recommendations are those which the Academic Alert Self-Study Committee considered most significant. Each is accompanied by the plan and timetable projected for its implementation.

Recommendation 1: A collegewide standard for indicating a student's academic performance as "not satisfactory" should be established.

The Vice President for Education will establish a committee to study and recommend a workable standardized method of evaluating students' academic performance. The committee will also establish a clear set of evaluative terms such as letter grades to replace the current vague evaluations of "satisfactory" and "needs improvement." The new evaluation system will be in operation for Fall 1986.

Recommendation 2: A collegewide standard for indicating a student's attendance in lecture and in lab courses as "not satisfactory" should also be established.

The Vice President for Education will establish a committee to study and recommend a workable standardized method of evaluating students' attendance. The committee will also consider the differences in the types of courses involved, i.e. lectures, science labs, and language labs. The new evaluation system will be in operation for Fall 1986.

Recommendation 3: Students should receive a better orientation to Academic Alert when they enter Miami-Dade.

Recommendation 4: A system should be developed to follow up the Academic Alert letter to make sure students and faculty respond to the messages.

The collegewide Student Services Committee will initiate the development and implemention of a one-credit orientation course which includes a component for thorough orientation of the students to the Academic Alert system and related support systems. The pilot program for all full-time freshmen will be conducted in the Winter Term of 1985. A follow up study in future terms should show higher retention rate and improved academic performance. The program will be ready for implementation on all campuses for Fall 1985.

Recommendation 5: More positive steps should be taken to insure that students (especially first year students) and instructors interact with each other after the Academic Alert letter is sent.

Recommendation 6: The training and orientation of administrators, faculty, and staff should be improved so all Miami-Dade professionals and staff will have a working knowledge of Academic Alert.

The College will schedule a series of workshops to train and orient administrators, faculty, and staff to the Academic Alert system. The workshops will be designed and implemented by the Staff and Program Development departments on each campus. Upon completion of the workshops, attendees will have a working knowledge of the Academic Alert system. In addition, strategies for interacting with students after they receive their Academic Alert letters will be presented. The pilot design will be developed in the Fall Term of 1985. The workshops will be scheduled on a regular basis beginning in the Winter Term of 1986.

Recommendation 7: More assistance should be provided for Black non-Hispanic and Hispanic students to help them maintain academic progress.

The College will schedule a series of workshops to sensitize administrators, faculty, and staff to the special needs of Black non-Hispanic and Hispanic students to maintain satisfactory academic performance. The workshops will be designed and implemented by the Staff and Program Development departments on each campus. The pilot workshops will be conducted in the Fall Term of 1985. The workshops will be scheduled on a regular basis beginning in the Winter Term of 1986.

Recommendation 8: Students should receive an Academic Alert letter in the spring and summer terms.

The Computer-based Instructional Development and Research office will study the possibility of sending students an Academic Alert letter in the spring and summer terms. The students should receive their letters in the third week of each six-week term and in the sixth week of the combined twelve-week term. If Academic Alert could be utilized in the spring/summer terms, the system should be operational for the Spring/Summer Terms of 1986.

STUDENT INFORMATION AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

PART 3

STANDARDS OF ACADEMIC PROGRESS

(SOAP)

MIAMI-DADE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

1984 INSTITUTIONAL SELF-STUDY

ABSTRACT

Standards of Academic Progress (SOAP) is one of three computerized student support systems developed by Miami-Dade Community College as part of its recent educational reforms. The system identifies students having academic difficulty, imposes appropriate restrictions, and monitors the effect of intervention strategies on student progress at the end of each term.

This study examined the acceptance, impact, and effectiveness of SOAP as related to Miami-Dade administrators, faculty, staff, students, and various community groups. The main concerns were the percentage of students affected by SOAP; the collegewide level of awareness of intervention strategies used with students in non-clear SOAP categories; the effectiveness of the SOAP system from the perspective of administrators, faculty, staff and students; the involvement of faculty in the SOAP system; the faculty perception of SOAP intervention on student academic performance; the reaction of the community to the SOAP concept; and the reaction of the Southeast Florida Education Consortium to the SOAP concept. The key issues concerned the impact of SOAP on student academic performance and retention, the use of SOAP intervention strategies by faculty, and the reaction to SOAP by the community.

The data were obtained through questionnaire surveys of administrators, faculty, staff, students, and community groups; previous SOAP reports; and student interviews. The surveys were tabulated by computer and results reported by frequency and percentage.

The study showed that the SOAP concept is accepted by administrators, faculty, staff, students, and community groups. The main problems are a

need for increased communication of information about the system, and for increased awareness of the SOAP process on the part of Miami-Dade administrators, faculty, staff, and students.

The committee recommends the development of a more effective orientation to the SOAP system for administrators, faculty, and staff; required orientation to SOAP and all its ramifications and support systems for all entering students; and increased involvement of faculty and staff in advisement.

Future plans include orientation sessions, workshops, seminars for new students to explain SOAP and related systems, and a mentorship for all students in non-clear SOAP categories.

EVALUATION OF THE STANDARDS OF ACADEMIC PROGRESS SYSTEM (SOAP)

DESCRIPTION OF THE SYSTEM

The Standards of Academic Progress (SOAP) is one of three computerized student support systems examined by the Student Information and Performance Standards Committee as part of the Miami-Dade Community College 1984 Self-Study. The study concentrated on the acceptance, impact, and effectiveness of SOAP as perceived by Miami-Dade administrators, faculty, staff, students, and by various community groups.

Development and Implementation

The SOAP system was developed in three stages. Each successive stage represented a refinement of the academic standards categories. Figures 3-1, 3-2, and 3-3 illustrate the development of the various SOAP categories from their inception in 1978 to the Winter Term of 1985.

Stage One, 1978. The initial phase of the SOAP system included five categories: warning, probation, suspension, dismissal, and clear. Each category was assigned an Alpha designator to identify the student's academic standing for registration and advisement. The categories, parameters, and codes are indicated in Figure 3-1.

FIGURE 3-1

SOAP Categories - 1978

ACADEMIC STANDARDS CATEGORY	RESULT	STANDING CODES*
7-16 credits attempted with less than a 1.5 cumulative grade point average	Academic Warning	A
17-29 credits attempted with less than a 1.5 cumulative grade point average	Academic Probation	B
17-29 credits registered for but earned credit in less than half	Academic Probation **	C
30+ credits registered for but earned credit in less than half	Academic Suspension	D
30+ credits attempted with less than a 1.5 cumulative grade point average	Academic Suspension	E
Failure to maintain 2.0 GPA and to earn at least half the credits registered for during probation following suspension re-admit	Academic Dismissal	F
All students not falling into the other categories.	Clear	0

Notes: * Standing codes are Alpha designators of the various SOAP categories, which are referred to in terms of results (e.g. A refers to "warning," B and C to "probation.") The standing code appears on student documents such as transcripts and AGIS reports.

** In calculating these categories, incomplete grades (I) and audit grades (X) were not included. Only pass or fail grades (A-F) are calculated.

The following explanations clarify the implications of the academic standards categories and resulting actions listed in Figure 3-1.

Academic Warning (Code A). Academic Warning signifies a limitation of nine credits in the fall term, nine in the winter term, three in the spring term, and three in the summer term. In addition, students in this category must take three or more credits as part of a prescribed program of intervention which attempts to assist the student. In such cases, the limitation of credits may be increased by three.

Academic Probation (Codes B and C). Academic Probation also signifies a limitation of nine credits in the fall term, nine in the winter term, three in the spring term, and three in the summer term. As part of the credit limitation, students must have three or more credits prescribed as part of a program of intervention. Students on academic probation who, on the basis of each term's performance, earn half of their credits and maintain a 2.0 term grade point average, are not suspended for academic reasons.

Academic Suspension (Codes D and E). Academic Suspension requires a student to discontinue enrollment at Miami-Dade through the next major term. Neither the spring nor the summer terms, nor the combination of both, is considered a major term; thus, students may not take classes in these terms if suspension occurs at the end of the winter term. Students who discontinue their enrollment because of suspension during a major term may re-enter the College on probationary status and continue each subsequent term of enrollment, provided they maintain a 2.0 grade point average (GPA) and successfully complete at least half the credits for which they register.

Academic Dismissal (Code F). Academic Dismissal requires a separation of the student from the College for at least twelve months. It occurs after the student fails to meet minimum requirements during probation following suspension. If, after re-admission following suspension, the student fails to maintain a 2.0 GPA and earn credit in at least half the credits for which he/she is registered, the student is separated from the College. A student is eligible to apply for re-admission to the College after the dismissal period only on a petition basis. For re-admission to be approved, the petition must present evidence of some change in the student's circumstances.

Stage Two, 1979-81. During the terms subsequent to the implementation of the SOAP system in 1978, additional SOAP categories were introduced to accommodate conditions and actions resulting from the initial implementation. Figure 3-2 represents those expanded SOAP categories which were developed during the 1979-80 and 1980-81 years.

FIGURE 3-2

SOAP Categories 1980 - 1981

Standing Code	Results	Explanation in relation to Figure 3-1
A	Warning	No change
B	Probation	No change - withdrawal
C	Probation	No change - low GPA
D	Suspension	Excessive withdrawals
E	Suspension	Low GPA
F	Dismissal	Excessive withdrawals
G	Dismissal	Low GPA
N	Appeal Suspension (W)	Categories for those students re-admitted through appeal following suspension
P	Appeal Suspension (GPA)	
Q	Appeal Dismissal (W)	Categories for those students re-admitted through appeal following dismissal
R	Appeal Dismissal (GPA)	
S	Override	Permission granted to exceed credit limitation
T	Extended Probation	Categories for those suspended or dismissed students who maintain GPA and earn minimum number of credits each term
U	Extended Probation	
X	Suspension	Special guidance summer program (intervention strategy)

A summary of SOAP categories for students at the end of the Fall Term of 1979 indicated that approximately 12% of all 42,762 students appeared in one of the negative SOAP categories. Overall, 4% were suspended, with some variation among campuses ranging from two percent at the Medical Center to five percent on North Campus (Losak, 1980). At the end of the Fall Term of 1980, approximately 11% of all 43,797 students appeared in one or another of the negative categories. This represented a decrease of one percent from the close of the Fall Term of 1979 (Losak, 1980). This trend continued through the Fall Term of 1981. By the end of the 1981-82 year, a distribution pattern confirmed an increase in the proportion of students falling under the warning category rather than the probation or suspension categories (Mannchen, 1981).

Stage Three, 1982. Beginning with the Fall Term of 1982, an expanded SOAP system was put in place which is still current. The new SOAP categories led to some expected shifts in student headcounts among the various categories. The rationale for the policy change was (1) to alert students who were approaching graduation without sufficiently high GPA's and (2) to avoid placing into a suspension category students who had not first been alerted. The changes in the standards thus focused on giving additional support and/or an earlier alert to students experiencing academic difficulties. The impact of this policy change is shown in Figure 3-3.

FIGURE 3-3

SOAP Categories, Fall 1982

1982 Category	Code	Equivalent Category/Code Under 1981 Standards
Clear	O	Includes most students formerly classified as O (Clear). Excludes students with 30 - 44.9 credits attempted and GPA 1.50 - 1.79, and students with 45+ credits attempted and GPA 1.50 - 1.99. These students are now in category C (Probation).
Warning	A	Equivalent to A (Warning). No change in standards.
Warning	H	Equivalent to B (formerly Probation). 17 - 29.9 credits registered and excessive course withdrawals.
Probation	B	Includes students formerly classified as D (Suspension): Those who registered for 30 - 44.9 credits and had excessive course withdrawals.
Probation	C	Includes all students formerly classified as C (Probation) plus those students moved from the Clear category.
Suspension	D	Includes students formerly classified as D (Suspension) who registered for 45 or more credits and had excessive course withdrawals. A new category J (Suspension Alert) has been created for those in this group who were Clear the previous term.
Suspension	E	Includes most students formerly classified as E (Suspension). A new category K (Suspension Alert) has been created for those students who would fall into the E category but were Clear the previous term.

FIGURE 3-3
(continued)

1982 Category	Code	Equivalent Category/Code Under 1981 Standards
Dismissal	F	F (Dismissal) No change in standards
Dismissal	G	G (Dismissal) No change in standards
Suspension Alert	J	Includes many students formerly classified in D (Suspension): Those who registered for 45 or more credits and had excessive course withdrawals but were in Clear (O) category the previous term.
Suspension Alert	K	Includes students formerly classified in E (Suspension) who were Clear the previous term.
Override	S	S (Override). No change in standards.
Extended Probation	T	Includes many students formerly classified as T; category has been adjusted to reflect changes in the D (Suspension) category.
Extended Probation	U	U (Extended Probation).

While the changes shown in Figure 3-3 appear complicated, the net results of expected headcount changes in the new categories compared to the previous categories were a lower headcount in the Clear category; an increased headcount in Warning; a substantial increase in the Probation category; and a reduction in headcount in the Suspension category (Morris et al, 1983).

RESEARCH GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The three key evaluation goals for this study are to determine

1. Impact of SOAP on student performance and on other College reform components;
2. Effectiveness of the SOAP system; and
3. Awareness and acceptance of SOAP by administrators, faculty, staff, students, and the community.

The main objectives derived from these goals were to determine

1. Percentage of students affected by SOAP;
2. Effectiveness of the SOAP system from the perspective of administrators, faculty, staff, and students;
3. Faculty and student perception of the effect of SOAP intervention on student academic performance;
4. Faculty involvement in the SOAP system;
5. Collegewide level of awareness and understanding of the general goals and purpose of SOAP;
6. Collegewide understanding of the SOAP categories;
7. Collegewide awareness of intervention strategies used for students on SOAP;
8. Community reaction to the SOAP concept; and
9. Reaction to the SOAP concept by educators at other local post-secondary institutions.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Most of the data in this section were obtained from four separate questionnaires which were completed by administrators, faculty, staff, and students in the Spring and Fall Terms of 1984. The questionnaires addressed the goals and objectives previously listed in the study goals and objectives section. Some data were also drawn from previous College studies. A few questions related to SOAP appeared on the community questionnaires. These results are discussed at the end of the data analysis section.

The tables reflect the combining of responses Strongly Agree and Agree, and of Strongly Disagree and Disagree, into the categories of Agree and Disagree respectively. The Not Applicable or Don't Know responses are represented by N/A. The data in the tables are rounded to the whole decimal.

Effectiveness of SOAP System

All groups surveyed indicated that SOAP is an effective means of identifying students experiencing course difficulties. In surveys of students who had been in non-clear SOAP categories, 81% of the 1984 Spring Term students and 87% of the 1984 Fall Term students showed favorable reactions.

Further, more than half of the students who had never been in a non-clear SOAP category indicated that SOAP is an effective means of identifying students who experience course difficulties. Sixty-five percent of the staff and administrators also expressed this opinion (see Table 3-1). Of the faculty surveyed, 69% agreed with this view, 6%

disagreed, and 25% had no response. This latter group evidently felt that the determination of SOAP's effectiveness was not within their responsibility or that they did not have sufficient information to evaluate SOAP.

TABLE 3-1

Perceptions of the SOAP System as an Effective Means of Identifying Students Having Difficulty with Their Courses

Responding Groups	N	Survey Responses		
		Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Students in Non-clear SOAP Categories	112	87	9	4
Administrators/Staff	321	65	7	28
Faculty	182	69	6	25

Appropriateness and Understanding of SOAP Categories

Sixty-nine percent of the faculty responded that they believed that the SOAP categories are appropriate for classifying students with academic difficulties. The majority of the students (81%) and the administrators and staff (66%) also felt that the categories were appropriate (see Table 3-2). Of the faculty surveyed, 64% indicated an understanding of the SOAP categories, 17% did not understand the categories, and 19% responded that the question was not applicable to them. On the other hand, 37% of the faculty also responded that they did not have sufficient information about SOAP for accurate advisement of students.

TABLE 3-2

Appropriateness of SOAP Categories For Classifying Students with Academic Difficulties

Responding Groups	N	Survey Responses		
		Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Students in Non-clear SOAP Categories	113	81	13	5
Faculty	182	69	6	25
Administrators/Staff	321	66	8	26

Forty-five percent of the faculty indicated that SOAP is helpful in improving academic performance, 10% did not agree, and 44% did not respond. Of the administrators and staff responding, 50% indicated that they understood the SOAP categories, yet only 25% indicated that they had sufficient information about SOAP for accurate advisement of students.

Of the student services staff surveyed, 50% stated that they had sufficient SOAP information to advise students. According to College policy, advisors and counselors have direct responsibility for advisement of non-clear SOAP students. However, student services also includes admissions, registration, financial aid, and student activities which are not related to SOAP intervention. Two-thirds of the student services staff did indicate belief that the SOAP categories are appropriate for classifying students with academic difficulties and that SOAP is beneficial in identifying and providing assistance to students experiencing academic difficulties. Fifty percent felt that SOAP is helpful in improving the academic performance of students enrolled at the College.

Awareness of Special Courses for SOAP Students

Of those students in non-clear SOAP categories, 30% in the Fall Term of 1984 and 27% in the Spring Term of 1984 were unaware of special courses designed for non-clear SOAP students. The majority of administrators and staff did not know about courses for students in non-clear SOAP categories. However, 50% of those employed at Miami-Dade more than four years knew of these special courses. Among the faculty, 45% were aware that special courses are available for students in non-clear SOAP categories; 35% were unaware; and 20% did not respond.

Understanding of Course Load Limits and SOAP Registration Process

The majority of students who have been in non-clear SOAP categories indicated an understanding of course load limits. Sixty-six percent of this same group indicated an understanding of the SOAP registration process. However, students not in non-clear SOAP categories did not understand the process. Less than 50% of administrators and staff surveyed were aware of course load limitations imposed by the non-clear SOAP categories. Only one-third of that population fully understood the various restrictions imposed upon non-clear SOAP students while less than half understood the consequences of course withdrawal.

Among faculty, 44% were aware of course load limits; 33% were unaware; and 22% did not respond. Twenty-seven percent fully understood the SOAP registration process; 51% did not; and 22% did not respond. Thirty-nine percent did not understand the consequences of excessive withdrawls from classes under the SOAP system; 48% did not respond.

The majority (90%) of the community respondents stated that course loads should be limited if students are performing poorly.

Understanding Where SOAP Information Can Be Obtained

Thirty-nine percent of fall term students and 43% of spring term students did not know where to obtain SOAP information. Only 40% of the administrators and staff knew where to obtain SOAP information. The majority of those surveyed indicated that they did not have sufficient SOAP information for accurate advisement of students. Only 33% of the faculty were aware of the sources for obtaining SOAP information while 45% were unaware and 21% did not respond.

Recognition of Superior Academic Progress

Both student survey groups responded that SOAP should also recognize superior academic performance. Interestingly, students previously in non-clear SOAP categories preferred to be recognized for superior academic performance (see Table 3-3). Over 50% of administrators and staff believed that SOAP should also recognize superior academic performance. Thirty-seven percent of the faculty indicated that SOAP should address levels of superior academic performance; 38% responded negatively; and 24% did not respond.

TABLE 3-3

Student Preferences for SOAP Recognizing Superior Academic Performance

Responding Groups	N	Survey Responses		
		Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Students in Non-clear SOAP Categories	113	78	15	7
Students in Clear SOAP Category	772	52	13	35

Rigidity of SOAP Rules

Students who had been in non-clear SOAP categories appeared to be more receptive to accepting the rigid SOAP rules than those students who had never been in non-clear SOAP categories. Students in the clear SOAP category gave no response (see Table 3-4).

TABLE 3-4

Acceptance of Rigid SOAP Rules by Students in Non-clear SOAP Categories (N=113)

Responding Groups	Survey Responses		
	Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Students in Non-clear SOAP Categories	62	8	30

The majority (90%) of the community respondents indicated that there should be rigid rules in place to identify and assist students who are performing poorly.

Awareness of SOAP Category

Students in the clear SOAP category indicated that they understand the SOAP categories better than the SOAP intervention strategies. Twenty-five percent of the students in non-clear SOAP categories indicated an awareness of a SOAP appeals process in the suspension and dismissal categories.

Maintenance of SOAP System

The majority of students responded that Miami-Dade should continue to spend the money to maintain the SOAP system. Sixty percent of the faculty responded favorably to continuing the SOAP system; 10% responded negatively; 29% did not respond (see Table 3-5).

TABLE 3-5

Perceptions of Miami-Dade Continuing to Allocate Funds for Maintaining the SOAP System

		Survey Responses		
Responding Groups	N	Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Students in Non-clear SOAP Categories	113	76	18	7
Faculty	182	60	10	29

The majority of the sampled students indicated that the SOAP process is a necessary academic tool (see Table 3-6).

TABLE 3-6

The SOAP Process as a Necessary Academic Tool

Responding Groups	N	Survey Responses Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Students in Non-clear SOAP Categories	113	85	10	5
Students in Clear SOAP Category	776	77	3	20

Two-thirds of the administrators and staff also indicated that the College is heading in the right direction with regard to the SOAP system.

Quality of Advisement

A major response difference was noted between the two student populations surveyed. Students in the spring term felt that SOAP was not helpful for academic performance improvement, whereas students in the fall term felt their academic performance was improved by SOAP. This difference probably reflects the difference in student composition during the spring term. Most of the students enrolled during spring are completing courses to transfer to other institutions, to accelerate fulfillment of graduation requirements, or to improve their basic skill deficiencies.

The majority of the administrators and staff surveyed indicated that sufficient support services are not provided to assist students in non-clear SOAP categories. Fifty percent of the administrators and staff surveyed responded that SOAP implementation had not caused a decrease in staff communication with students.

Awareness of SOAP System

Seventy-two percent of the faculty surveyed were aware of SOAP and 21% were unaware (see Table 3-7). Assistant, associate and full professors who have been employed by the College from one to 13 years appeared to be more aware of SOAP than new faculty. These results suggest that new employees are not effectively informed about the system.

TABLE 3-7

Faculty Awareness of SOAP (N = 185)

	Survey Responses		
Responding Group	Agree %	Disagree %	N/A %
Faculty	72	21	7

Fifty percent of the administrators and staff were unaware of how SOAP has been helpful in improving students' academic progress at Miami-Dade. Eighty-three percent of the academic affairs and student services employees indicated that they were aware of SOAP while administrative services showed a 45% awareness of SOAP. Full-time student services staff indicated a greater awareness of course load limitations imposed by SOAP, special courses necessary for non-clear SOAP students, the consequence of course withdrawal, SOAP registration process, and SOAP information sources than other groups surveyed. Two-thirds of the population surveyed indicated that they were aware of the SOAP system. The percentage for less than one year employment dropped to 50%.

Among personnel employed at the College more than one year, two-thirds responded that SOAP is an effective means for identifying students having course difficulties. However, the majority of administrators and staff were not sure whether the College provides sufficient support services to assist students in SOAP.

When survey questions concerning awareness read "fully understands," faculty responses tended to be lower. However, since SOAP is considered a prescriptive intervention, both faculty and staff need to understand how SOAP operates in order to improve assessment of student needs.

Understanding of SOAP by Part-time Faculty

Some of the part-time faculty surveyed (44%) were unaware of the SOAP system. Findings indicated that only 14% of the part-timers had sufficient information while 50% felt that SOAP was effective. Forty-two percent of the part-time faculty knew about the College's overall SOAP policy while 36% indicated that they had insufficient information about SOAP for accurate advisement of students. These results also indicated that most part-time faculty employed at the College for less than one year were unaware of SOAP policies.

Understanding of SOAP by Students

The surveys indicated that non-clear SOAP students in the Spring Term of 1984 were less positive about their academic advisement interview than those in the Fall Term of 1984. Students in the clear SOAP category answered throughout the surveys with non-commital responses. However, they did respond strongly in support of the College continuing its SOAP commitment.

Understanding of SOAP by Community Members

The eight community survey results represented responses from recent Miami-Dade graduates, local employers and service agencies, the College's occupational program advisory councils, high school counselors, the Southeast Florida Educational Consortium, and the general public. The findings were as follows:

- The majority (80%) indicated that students must show adequate progress to continue their studies.
- The majority (90%) indicated that there should be rigid rules to identify and assist students who are performing poorly.
- The majority (90%) indicated that students' course loads should be limited if they are performing poorly.

CONCLUSIONS

Based upon the findings of this study and of previous studies conducted by the College Office of Institutional Research, the SOAP study subcommittee concluded that SOAP is an effective and necessary academic tool for students who are experiencing academic difficulties at Miami-Dade. SOAP is looked upon favorably by the College as well as by the community, and resources should continue to be spent on this system.

The subcommittee further concluded that administrators, faculty, staff, and students need more information and higher awareness about the SOAP system for better advisement. New students and new Miami-Dade employees show the least knowledge about the system, indicating lack of effective orientation to Miami-Dade systems. There were high non-commital survey responses from all campuses.

Another conclusion was that student services respondents seemed to be the most knowledgeable about SOAP policies.

The subcommittee also concluded that greater interaction between faculty and students and a better understanding of SOAP policies are necessary for improved academic performance.

The subcommittee concluded that the quality of advisement services to students should be improved. Advisors need to spend more time with non-clear SOAP students in order to disseminate appropriate information. Another conclusion was that because part-time faculty have some involvement with SOAP, they need to be included in orientation sessions.

The subcommittee also found that students in non-clear SOAP categories understood the SOAP categories better than they understood the SOAP intervention strategies.

A final conclusion was that students with superior academic performance should also receive recognition through the SOAP system.

Further analysis of the study's questionnaire data may be found in the separate reference files for this study. These also contain copies of all research instruments, data, printouts, and other pertinent background documentation.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROJECTIONS

The following recommendations are those which the SOAP Self-Study Committee considered most significant. Each is accompanied by the plan and timetable projected for its implementation.

Recommendation 1: Students should be better informed on the availability and benefits of the SOAP-related support systems.

The collegewide Student Services Committee will mandate a one-credit orientation course for all entering freshmen. The course will include a complete explanation of SOAP as well as other student information and performance support systems. A pilot course will be implemented on North Campus in the Winter Term of 1985.

Recommendation 2: Administrators, faculty, and staff should be further trained to have better understanding of SOAP.

SOAP information will be made more accessible through workshops and orientation sessions. The Staff and Program Development departments on each campus will implement a series of workshops which will include detailed information on the SOAP system. Administrators, faculty and staff will be included in the training programs. The first workshops will be conducted during the Winter Term of 1986.

Recommendation 3: Faculty should become more involved in the SOAP intervention process.

The College will establish a faculty mentorship program for all students in non-clear SOAP categories. The program will be planned in the Fall Term of 1985 and implemented in the Winter Term of 1986.

Recommendation 4: The College should continue to evaluate the SOAP system in regard to student performance.

The College will evaluate the SOAP system at the end of each academic year beginning with 1985-86.

VOLUME SUMMARY

The following are the collective findings and conclusions of the Volume:

1. Faculty need more training and familiarization on AGIS usage.
2. Better dissimination and communication regarding AGIS usage and changes need to be instituted.
3. Certain components of AGIS are not easily understood and should be modified for clarity.
4. The AGIS system is effective in meeting its intended objectives.
5. Administrators, faculty, staff, and students need more information about the Academic Alert support system.
6. Greater interaction between faculty and students following the Academic Alert message is needed.
7. Black and Hispanic students need more individual attention than White Non-Hispanic students in order to maintain satisfactory academic performance.
8. No standard for evaluating academic performance or attendance exists.
9. The Academic Alert system has had a positive impact on students' academic performance.
10. Students need information on the various SOAP-related support systems.
11. Better understanding of SOAP policies is necessary both for students and college personnel.
12. Advisors need to spend more time with non-clear SOAP students.

13. No effective orientation to the various Miami-Dade computerized systems exists.

14. The SOAP system is an effective and necessary academic tool for students who are experiencing academic difficulty.

Overall, the Self-Study evaluation of AGIS, Academic Alert, and SOAP produced the following two general findings:

1. All target groups surveyed agreed that the three systems evaluated in this volume were useful and effective.

2. A significant number of students, faculty, staff, and administrators (especially new students and faculty) were not adequately familiar with the three systems indicating a need for better dissemination and communication regarding their usage and application.

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1984 SELF-STUDY

VOLUME 1 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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AUGUST 30, 1985